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WAXMAN URGES CONTEMPT CITATION FOR COMMERCE SECRETARY MORTON

Representative Henry A. Waxman (D-Los Angeles) told Secretary of Commerce Rogers Morton at the meeting of the House Interstate and Foreign Commerce Subcommittee today that he would vote to hold him in contempt of Congress because of his refusal to comply with a Subcommittee subpoena seeking information on the Arab boycott.

"If the effect of Secretary Morton's refusal to comply with our subpoena is to say we are going to wink at a boycott then we will have given a clear signal to escalate discrimination in this country against our own citizens of various racial and ethnic minorities as may be dictated by the whims of foreign governments."

"The Secretary's attitude makes clear to me that we may be helping to implement the boycott policy of the Arab governments, not just acquiescing in them."

"I am therefore ready to vote to hold you in contempt," Representative Waxman told Secretary Morton.

For the past several weeks, the Commerce Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations has been reviewing the Arab boycott of United States firms which deal with Israel. By law, all exporters must report to the Commerce Department's Office on Export Administration if they are asked to participate by a foreign nation in a boycott. On July 28, the Subcommittee issued a subpoena to the Commerce Department for the documents filed in that office pursuant to the law.

"Evidence before the Subcommittee indicates there have been massive

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evasions of this simple reporting requirement, and that the Commerce Department has been lax in enforcing the reporting requirement. It is imperative we have the information that was subpoenaed if we are to lay these disturbing questions to rest. Further, we cannot, if necessary, formulate remedial legislation if we remain unaware of the true scope of the problem," Rep. Waxman told the subcommittee.

In his letter to the Congress refusing to comply with the Subcommittee's subpoena, Secretary Morton claimed that disclosure of the list of American corporations asked to join an anti-Israel boycott would be "inconsistent" with the national interest, and would also make them vulnerable to consumer action if information detrimental to their corporate image were disclosed.

Representative Waxman added: "It is clear to me that the Secretary values corporate secrecy more than the public's right to know which firms may be aiding the Arab League's restrictive and discriminatory trade practices. But what is unsolved here is not even the public's right to know, it is the Congress's right to have this information, which may very well be held confidential by the House Committee.

"It is crucial that we avoid a breach of trust between our two branches of government over this issue so that Congress and the President can work together to oppose the Arab boycott - which the President has said he wants to do."